Overview

On May 30th, 2017 the ROI4Kids team hosted a workshop in Edmonton with key stakeholders from Alberta and across Canada. The goal of this workshop was to engage researchers, policy makers, and practitioners in school-based child health promotion to identify school health programs and/or policies that could be evaluated in a Return on Investment (ROI) Framework.

To achieve this goal, the workshop involved several facilitated group discussions to consider and prioritize promising program and policy types, as well as key considerations used by participants when choosing school-based program/policy options. These facilitated discussions employed a cumulative voting exercise (dotmocracy) to identify which options should be prioritized for economic modelling. Attendees also spent time considering the components needed to implement, execute, and maintain each of the program/policy types, and identified specific programs/policies they believed aligned with the program/policy type.

The information gathered at this workshop will serve as a foundation for the ROI4Kids team to direct next research steps, specifically the modelling of the forecasting impact of school-based programs and policies. This modelling will quantify implementation costs and estimate cost savings resulting from avoided health care costs. This workshop is part of the overall ROI4Kids research project, which is a 5-year collaborative research and innovation (CRI) team grant funded by Alberta Innovates.

ROI4Kids Research Objectives
Workshop Presentations & Processes

Workshop presentations provided an overview of the ROI4Kids project and a detailed explanation on economic modelling of school health programs and policies. In this presentation, biostatistician Dr. John Paul Ekwaru described how economic modelling is carried out, and what specific inputs are needed to conduct an ROI calculation for a school health program or policy.

Necessary inputs are:

- Description of the school health program or policy
- Program costs
- Effects of program or policy on risk factors (e.g., diet, body weight, physical activity)
- Transition probabilities (trajectories) of risk factors over the life course
- Effect of risk factors on chronic diseases
- Effect of risk factors and diseases on quality of life and mortality
- Health care costs attributable to chronic diseases

Workshop Activities

Key Considerations

Based on the pre-workshop survey responses to the question: “What key considerations do you take into account when prioritizing different school-based child health programs/policies aimed at improving healthy eating, active living, and reducing future chronic disease (e.g., cost, equity, research evidence)?” a list of 17 possible key considerations was compiled and presented to participants.

To refine this list, tables engaged in a think/pair/share activity. Individuals were asked to pick their top 3 from the existing list or any additional key considerations they felt were important and not yet captured. As a pair, table partners then determined their top 4. Table groups then reconvened to share these pair choices and determine the top 5 key considerations for their table.
The top key considerations for the overall workshop group were:

- Research/Evidence Based
- Sustainable
- Equitable
- Feasible
- Whole School/Comprehensive

Attendees were asked to keep these considerations in mind throughout the day, as they engaged in discussions to prioritize school-based programs and policies.

**Choosing our Options**

The second half of the workshop focused on choosing program or policy types. Participants reviewed a list of 29 possible program/policy types organized under 5 categories: Nutrition, Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour & Screen Time, Nutrition & Physical Activity, and Other.

This inventory was compiled using findings from a large systematic review of school-based interventions (Wang et al. 2015) and responses to the pre-workshop survey question: "If you were in a position to fund school-based programs/policies aimed at improving healthy eating and active living, and reducing future chronic disease among children in Canada, what types of programs or policies would they be?"

Participants reviewed the infographic, discussed the types, and added any they believed were missing. Each participant was given 5 dots to select the program/policy types they felt were the most important. They could allocate all 5 dots on one type or they could disperse their dots across several types. All dots were then counted to determine which program or policy types were most highly favoured by attendees.

The top 7 program/policy types were (in rank order):

1. Comprehensive School Health/Whole School Approach
2. School/Board Nutrition Policy
3. Universal School Food/Feeding Program
4. Increase Availability of Healthy Foods
5. Daily Physical Education/Physical Education
6. Increase Physical Activity During School
7. Change Foods Sold & Served in Schools
Choosing our Options - Part II

Once program and policy types had been prioritized, workshop participants were asked to identify any components that they felt were needed for the implementation of a program or policy that fit within these specific types. Participants went around the room in small groups, stopping at each table to reflect on and document the necessary components to implement, execute, or maintain each program or policy type.

Following this, participants were asked to consider the necessary components they had collectively brainstormed and to identify any specific programs or policies that fit within each of the program/policy types. Attendees were asked to keep discussions limited to school-based programs or policies.

In total, workshop participants identified 92 specific programs/policies across the 7 prioritized program and policy types.

Next Steps

The ROI4Kids team has initiated a review of information for each of the specific programs and policies identified at the workshop, as well as other potential programs/policies within the types prioritized.

This review aims to identify programs or policies that align with the key considerations described in this report, and contain sufficient information to calculate a return on investment through economic modelling. We will convene a second workshop in the final year of our project to present the outcomes of the economic modelling and solicit feedback.
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References


This research was funded through the Collaborative Research and Innovation Opportunities (CRIO) Team program from Alberta Innovates (AI).